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Hawley Fogg-Davis
Princeton University (Student)

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AN ARGUMENT AGAINST AHISTORICAL "DIFFERENCE" IN FEMINIST POLITICAL THEORY

By Hawley Fogg-Davis¹

In the afterword to her book, *Women in Western Political Thought*, Susan Okin offers one possible explanation for the frustration that seems to accompany any attempt to talk about feminist political theory these days.² That frustration has to do with the relationship between theory and practice. What should this relationship look like? Okin observes, "most women can see that many of their rights and their theoretical options in life have increased, in part through the efforts of organized feminism. But in practice, many women are in some ways worse off now than fifteen years ago."³ Feminist political theorists should, in Okin's view, "spell out, explicitly, the policy implications that follow from their theoretical conclusions . . ."⁴

Okin traces this problem in feminist political theory to an ongoing two-tiered debate over the political significance of differences. On one hand, feminist critics have debated the political significance of differences between women and men; on the other hand, they have disagreed over the political significance of differences among women.⁵ It is Okin's opinion that "[b]oth issues of contention tend to cause divisions among feminists both as activists and as theorists, and may therefore partly explain the disparity between the current health of feminist theory (for theory often thrives on contention) and the relative weakness of feminist politics (which is often impeded by it)."⁶ This article addresses the second of Okin's concerns.

This concern began, according to Okin, "as a dispute within feminist politics as early as 1970, and was only later debated among theorists."⁷ She continues, "[e]arly in Second Wave feminism, black, working-class and lesbian women began to protest that the movement, dominated by white, middle-class heterosexual women, excluded them and their concerns."⁸ As it was taken up by theorists, this concern became known as the anti-essentialist critique, its proponents often referred to as "difference feminists." While Okin's warning regarding the proliferation of claims based on difference is well-taken, I wish to challenge her blanket description of so-called anti-essentialist critiques. Like many political theorists, she fails to critically examine the ways in which the historical tension between white and black Americans continues to mold our contemporary understanding of difference.

W.E.B. DuBois rightly predicted that the problem of the Twentieth Century would be the color-line.⁹ How does the problem of the color-line impact feminist political theorizing? In this article, I argue that although the anti-essentialist critique has been stretched by Okin and other scholars to include many differences among women such as class, sexual orientation, physical ability and age, it remains a racialized critique. Black women have long been forced to live under

¹ Hawley Fogg-Davis is a graduate student in the Department of Politics at Princeton University, where she is working on the politics of transracial adoption.

² SUSAN M. OKIN, *WOMEN IN WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT* 310 (1992).

³ *Id.* at 310-11.

⁴ *Id.* at 311.

⁵ *Id.* at 318.

⁶ *Id.* at 319.

⁷ *Id.* at 325.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ W.E.B. DuBois, *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK* 1 (Penguin Books 1989) (1953) ("Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader, for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.")

ostensibly neutral code-words: welfare queen, teenage mother, matriarch, to name just a few. All of these words signify black women across socio-economic class, physical ability and sexuality. For example, Clint Bolick's *Wall Street Journal* Op-ed piece branding Lani Guinier a "Quota Queen" demonstrates the commonplace use of buzzwords to stigmatize middle-class black women.¹⁰ Okin's reference to the anti-essentialist critique of feminist political theory replicates this coded allusion to black women. Much like the political rhetoric of controlling the "inner-cities," white feminists' reference to difference feminism is, I believe, an attempt to simultaneously dilute and contain blackness.¹¹ Moreover, these linguistic manipulations comprise what Stephen Steinberg has diagnosed as the white liberal retreat from race, a post-*Brown v. Board of Education* attitude that deems socially and politically taboo any direct references to race.¹²

I will discuss the work of Judy Scales-Trent and Kimberle Crenshaw, two black female legal scholars whose work on black women as uniquely situated persons with respect to the Constitution shows a critical awareness of black-white tensions as the fundamental difference paradigm. Judy Scales-Trent argues in a 1989 article for the Constitutional definition of black women as a distinct group with a legal identity of its own.¹³ Kimberle Crenshaw has theorized about black women's unique "practical" experiences of being "in-between" the categories of race and sex in anti-discrimination cases brought under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, or constitutionally under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁴

DISENTANGLING DIFFERENCE: WHY THE DEBATE IS BLACK AND WHITE

Scholars increasingly deploy new terms to describe the changing racial and ethnic demographic make-up of America. By the year 2000 we can expect to have a work force that is eighty-five percent non-white.¹⁵ Within the past decade, political theorists have addressed this demographic shift under neologisms like multiculturalism, diversity and difference feminism. Multiculturalism and diversity, as philosophical values in public school education, have been hotly debated among political theorists.¹⁶ Feminist political theorist, Iris Marion Young, has endorsed a theoretical approach to American politics which values a plurality of group differences.¹⁷ Young upholds what she calls democratic cultural pluralism, a political model that envisions the good

¹⁰ Clint Bolick, *Quota Queens*, WALL ST. J., Apr. 30, 1993 at A12.

¹¹ DERRICK BELL, *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL* 4 (1992). ("What we now call the 'inner city' is, in fact, the American equivalent of the South African homelands.")

¹² Stephen Steinberg, *The Liberal Retreat from Race: A Historical Perspective*, Address at Race Matters: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain, Conference at Princeton University (Apr. 29, 1994).

¹³ Judy Scales Trent, *Black Women and the Constitution: Finding our Place, Asserting our Rights*, 24 HARV. C.R.-C.L.L. REV. 9 (1989).

¹⁴ Kimberle Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* in FEMINIST LEGAL THEORY FOUNDATIONS, 383, 383-395 (D. Kelly Weisberg ed., 1993).

¹⁵ Avery Gordan, Address, Diversity Management and the Corporate Model, given at Princeton University's Afro-American Studies Works in Progress Colloquium (Apr. 12, 1994).

¹⁶ See, e.g. Amy Gutmann, *Civic Education and Social Diversity*, 105 ETHICS 579 (Apr. 1995) ("Teaching toleration, mutual respect, and deliberation does not homogenize children or deny the value of genuine differences that are associated with diverse ways of individual and communal life. Quite the contrary, teaching these civic virtues supports the widest range of social diversity that is consistent with the ongoing pursuit of liberal democratic justice.") See also Lawrence A. Blum, *Antiracism, Multiculturalism, and Interracial Community: Three Educational Values for a Multicultural Society*. U. Mass Distinguished Lecture Series, November, 1991 (surpassing Gutmann's liberalism to call for the teaching of antiracism and the value of interracial community in public schools).

¹⁷ IRIS MARION YOUNG, *JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION*, 163 (1990).

society as "equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences."¹⁸

The de-Anglicization of America merits thoughtful intellectual inquiry. The problem with multiculturalism and diversity arguments is that they often present ahistorical or de-historicized pictures of racism in the United States. As Avery Gordan astutely observes in her study of diversity management in American corporations, the terms multiculturalism and diversity are currently used by "anti-racist" white liberals as "positive" and more "progressive" substitutes for affirmative action which is considered "backward" in its remedial justification.¹⁹ Whites perceive diversity as less threatening because, unlike affirmative action, it does not cost them personally.²⁰ By celebrating diversity, whites can adopt a de-historicized, nominal anti-racist position while perpetuating institutional arrangements which have historically disadvantaged blacks. All of this is carried out in the name of a more "progressive" philosophic value: diversity. Still, even though diversity empties race of its historical and socio-economic meaning, it signifies blackness in coded form as the paradigmatic difference. This phenomenon reflects Steinberg's depiction of a post Civil Rights Movement "liberal retreat from race."²¹

When Okin criticizes the difference feminists as if they were one group, she falls into the same problematic line of philosophical inquiry. What is missing from both the multiculturalist/diversity arguments and Okin's work is an historical account of how race has functioned throughout the history of the United States as the blueprint for difference. When Okin writes that, during the 1970s and '80s, "black, working-class and lesbian women began to protest that the movement, dominated by white, middle-class heterosexual women, excluded them and their concerns," she creates the misleading impression that all three of these groups of "different" women voiced a concerted critique of the feminist movement at the same historical moment.²² Contrary to Okin's characterization, black women's organized public criticism of white feminists' racism pre-dates the Second Wave considerably. Sojourner Truth's 1851 "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at the Women's Rights Conference in Akron, Ohio remains a pivotal indictment of white women's racist depiction of black women as "not woman enough."²³ At the same time, as Kimberle Crenshaw points out, white feminists have often translated Truth's words into generic feminist slogans, emptied of Truth's clear indictment of white suffragettes.²⁴ Crenshaw reminds, "[c]ontemporary white feminists inherit not the legacy of Truth's challenge to patriarchy but, instead, Truth's challenge to their forbearers."²⁵

It is this legacy that must be addressed on its own terms, thoughtfully and honestly by white feminist political theorists. U.S. feminism has been fundamentally shaped, from the First Wave, by a critical tension between whiteness and blackness. White suffragettes agitating for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment couched their political plea explicitly in racial terms. In a debate with Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony urged, "[i]f intelligence, justice, and morality are to have precedence in the Government, let the question of woman be brought up first and that of the Negro last."²⁶ Later, during the House debates over the passage of the Civil Rights Act of

¹⁸ *Id.* at 163.

¹⁹ Gordan, *supra* note 15 (noting that diversity management in corporations has become a big business unto itself. Many corporations hire diversity managers to conduct workshops designed to sensitize employees to differences in the workplace. These workshops are usually custom made to suit a particular corporation, and are pitched to employees as a source of communal fun /pleasure. With diversity management there is no need to dwell on negative like racism. Unlike affirmative action, diversity gives the illusion of a race neutral meritocracy.)

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Steinberg, *supra* note 12.

²² Okin, *supra* note 2, at 325.

²³ Crenshaw, *supra* note 14, at 387-88.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

1964, white women dramatically argued that if sex was not added to the bill, the status of white women would diminish in relationship to black women.²⁷ Representative Griffiths, a white woman, threatened her white male colleagues, "if you do not add sex to this bill . . . you are going to try to take the colored men and colored women and give them equal employment rights, and down at the bottom of the list is going to be a white woman with no rights at all."²⁸ Griffiths' words illustrate the kind of black-white tension that has shaped feminist politics.

The Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution, which legally abolished slavery and stated that blacks were to have the right to vote and equal protection of the laws, set the framework within which white women began campaigning for their right to vote. In the 1960s and early 70s, the push for analogous treatment of race and sex discrimination succeeded in changing both the legislative and executive branches' approach to sex-based laws.²⁹ In 1971, the Supreme Court held for the first time that sex-based classifications violate the Equal Protection Clause if such classifications do not bear a "fair and substantial relationship to legitimate ends."³⁰ Existing sex discrimination law is an expansion of anti-discrimination law based on race.

This brief overview is meant to re-historicize "difference feminism," to expose its racial underpinnings as a critical, under-theorized foundation of feminist politics. We find that instead of being just another "difference," race emerges as the key historical force in the shaping of feminist political thought. Sheila Foster explains that while there are many differences among persons that bring on individual and isolated biases, prejudices, and preferences, "race has a deep social significance that continues to disadvantage blacks and other Americans of color on a systematic level."³¹ While on some level all women may be oppressed because of their gender, race shapes gender oppression fundamentally for all women.

Some may object to my centering of race as the paradigmatic oppression in the United States, and argue instead that class divisions form an even deeper mode of oppression in the United States. I agree that one needs to explore the socio-economic factors of oppression; I do not believe that race and class can be treated as distinct forces at work in this country. I am interested in developing a sophisticated understanding of how class works in conjunction with the construction of blackness in the specific case of the United States, but such inquiry falls outside the scope of my project here. At this point I can only say that it would be too simplistic to expect that a class analysis alone could serve as the definitive oppression paradigm.

Here I am engaged in a more limited investigation. Primarily, I aim to rescue race from the "difference" lists which now dot the feminist landscape. Picked up and literally swept away in these increasingly routinized lists, race becomes a less threatening, less indicting presence. Difference lists empty race and gender and every other "difference" from their historical and socio-economic meanings, a disturbing phenomenon that Patricia Cain calls "the perfunctory footnote, dropped the first time the essential category 'woman' is mentioned, which acknowledges the differences of race and class, and sometimes sexual differences. Such politically correct footnotes name the differences, but I see no evidence in the accompanying texts that the preferences matter."³² Cain identifies a problematic superficial inclusion of differences that Okin replicates

²⁶ ELIZABETH C. STANTON, ET AL., *HISTORY OF WOMEN SUFFRAGE* VOL. 2, 383 (Arno Press 1969) (1882).

²⁷ Scales-Trent, *supra* note 13, at 11.

²⁸ *Id.* (quoting E.E.O.C., Legislative History of Title VII and IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

²⁹ Congress passed the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (equal pay for equal work), Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in education, and Executive Order 11246, requiring Affirmative Action by federal contractors to ensure equal employment opportunity for women and men.

³⁰ *Reed v. Reed*, 404 U.S. 71, 76 (1971).

³¹ Sheila Foster, *Difference and Equality: A Critical Assessment of the Concept of 'Diversity'*, *Wis. L. Rev.* 105, 137 (1993).

³² Patricia A. Cain, *Feminist Jurisprudence: Grounding the Theories*, in *FEMINIST LEGAL THEORY FOUNDATIONS* 359,

when she contends that one can separate gender and racial oppression without treating race as insignificant.³³

The problem for this paper is Okin's placement of race on an ahistorical difference list. It is, I think, no coincidence that race appears first on Okin's difference list, as if to simultaneously reinforce the inescapable racial nature of the difference paradigm and dilute blackness by nominally setting it on par with any other difference of which one can think. This move permits Okin to ironically essentialize the anti-essentialist critique. Stripped of historical meaning, the word "race" loses its moral force. With no mediating principle, a difference equals a difference. This horizontal stretching cloaks the racialized context of United States feminism. In the next section I briefly discuss critical race theory, a recent movement in legal theory which has begun to investigate the hypothesis that race is indeed the paradigmatic difference. The critical race theorists generally argue that a more thoughtful analysis of racism in America leads us to a more informed and helpful understanding of other kinds of oppression.

BLACK WOMEN IN CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical race theory is a "race-centered enterprise" of liberation scholarship developed by a small number of non-white law professors as a response to a post-Civil Rights Movement lull in race-based activism.³⁴ By the mid-1980s a small but influential body of work emerged, mostly in the form of law review articles, that deliberately challenged traditional methods of legal scholarship with creative meshings of legal discourse and personal experiences of racism and race-based activism. Racism occupies the central, unifying force in critical race theory and all critical race theorists conceive racism "not as isolated instances of conscious bigoted decision-making or prejudiced practice, but as larger, systemic, structural, and cultural, as deeply psychologically and socially ingrained."³⁵ Although racism thus conceived assumes a paradigmatic blackness, critical race theory recognizes how racism oppresses Asian Americans, and Latin and Chicano Americans.³⁶ Racism for these scholars is a radical lens through which to analyze oppressions based on gender, class and sexual orientation. The critical race theorists remove race from ahistorical difference lists to expose the ways in which race cuts across gender, class and sexual orientation.

While it may be argued that this move merely substitutes race for gender as the primary "cutting across" model, it is important to note that critical race theory aims to develop theories of multiple consciousness and interdependence that recognize that racism operates in tandem with other forms of oppression. Critical race theory's tenet of multiple consciousness aims to theorize about interdependence among a wide range of differences, including those not based on historical and systematic exclusion and disadvantage such as class and sexual orientation.³⁷ Nonetheless, this potential can only be realized within a prior, highly developed account of racism in America.

Kimberle Crenshaw and Judy Scales-Trent both theorize about black women's legal experiences of existing anti-discrimination law, taking racism, structurally understood, as their point of departure. In contrast to Okin's de-historicized depiction of race, Crenshaw and Scales-Trent provide deeply historicized models of gender liberation that conceive racism, not merely as "significant," but as a central, imbedded capillary force that molds other oppressions.

364 (D. Kelly Weisberg ed., 1993).

³³ Okin, *supra* note 2, at 327.

³⁴ Charles R. Lawrence III et al., *Introduction in WORDS THAT WOUND: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, ASSAULTIVE SPEECH, AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT 1, 5* (Mari J. Matsuda et al. eds., 1993).

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* at 2.

³⁷ *Id.* at 7.

The critical race theorists do not conceptualize power as possessory. As Kendall Thomas explains, "[i]n Foucault's analysis, power is not a possessory interest. It is rather a more complex network of practices that make up the general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society."³⁸ Of course critical race theorists differ from Foucault in that they focus on racism primarily, rather than power generally.

Transcending the "cry" that all women are different, the critical race theorists offer practical policy recommendations.³⁹ For instance, in the writings of Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality is the theoretical basis and recommendations for revamped jurisprudence are the policy prescriptions that seek to improve the lives of black women.⁴⁰ The two existing anti-discrimination legal frameworks are Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Whereas Title VII covers any employment discrimination based on race, sex, religion, color or national origin, the Equal Protection Clause is subject to the Supreme Court's interpretation of a particular group's historical and current social status.⁴¹ While the theory of black women's intersectionality has had a moderate, but important effect on Title VII employment cases, the Supreme Court has been reluctant to modify its interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause to address black women's intersectionality.⁴²

As Crenshaw points out, the first attempt to operationalize the idea of intersectionality occurred twelve years before she wrote her ground-breaking article analyzing black women's "double bind." In 1977, five black women brought suit under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, alleging that General Motors' seniority system "perpetuated the effects of past discrimination against Black women."⁴³ Plaintiffs produced evidence showing that prior to 1964 General Motors hired no black women, and that after 1964, during an economic recession, all black women lost their jobs in seniority-based layoffs.⁴⁴ Though the court refused to treat black women as a distinct class, *De Graffenreid v. General Motors* illustrates one instance in which black women clearly experienced a group disadvantage as black women, not as blacks or as women. The court's opinion echoes Okin's worry about a difference proliferation, "[t]he prospect of the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination, clearly raises the prospect of opening the hackneyed Pandora's box."⁴⁵

With this declaration, *De Graffenreid* seemed to issue the last word; despite evidence that black women were discriminated against as a distinct group, courts could ill-afford to get into the messy business of "super-remedies."⁴⁶ Thankfully, *De Graffenreid* did not quell the intersectionality problem for very long. Judy Scales-Trent notes that in 1980, the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled on the issue of whether black women should be protected under Title VII as a discrete class.⁴⁷ In *Jeffries v. Harris Cty. Community Action Association*, the court held that black women are protected under Title VII as a discrete class because "discrimination against black females can exist even in the absence of discrimination against black men or white women."⁴⁸ Jeffries, a black woman, provided evidence that every job she applied for with the the city had been filled by either a black man or white woman.⁴⁹ Consequently, she could claim neither racism nor

³⁸ Kendall Thomas, *Beyond the Privacy Principle*, 92 COLUM. L. REV. 1431,1480 (1992).

³⁹ Okin, *supra* note 2, at 328.

⁴⁰ Crenshaw, *supra* note 14, at 384.

⁴¹ 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2 (1991), *see* U.S. Const. amend. XIV, *see also* Scales-Trent, *supra* note 12, at 19.

⁴² *See* Scales-Trent, *supra* note 13, at 22.

⁴³ Crenshaw, *supra* note 14, at 384.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 384.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 385 (quoting *De Graffenreid v. General Motors*, 413 F. Supp. 142, 145 (1976), *modified by* 558 F.2d 480 (1977)).

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 384.

⁴⁷ Scales-Trent, *supra* note 13, at 16-17.

⁴⁸ *Jeffries v. Harris Cty. Community Action Ass'n*, 425 F.Supp. 1208, *modified by* 615 F.2d 1025 (1980).

sexism as the source of her discrimination. *Jeffries* marked a pivotal turning point. As Scales-Trent wrote in 1989, "[s]ince then, every court which has ruled on the issue, has agreed that black women can claim, as a distinct group, Title VII protection against discrimination based on the race/sex dual status."⁵⁰

As critical race theorists, both Crenshaw and Scales-Trent deal specifically with racism as it intersects with black women's experiences of discrimination. *De Graffenreid* and *Jeffries* exemplify this intersection as it occurs in the lives of black women. Scales-Trent develops an especially provocative prescription for the judicial treatment of Equal Protection cases involving black women. As it now stands, cases involving discrimination based on race receive strict scrutiny by courts and cases involving sex discrimination receive an intermediate level of scrutiny.⁵¹ Scales-Trent argues that cases involving black women should receive "strict scrutiny plus more" since black women satisfy the requirement for strict scrutiny, but experience increased levels and unique kinds of discrimination because of their gender.⁵² Anticipating the "slippery slope" objection, Scales-Trent states that the criteria of a discrete and insular minority would sufficiently limit the scope of Equal Protection law to those who can form themselves into groups exhibiting immutable characteristics (e.g. race, gender, national origin, mental retardation and (il)legitimacy), and a history of prejudice and political powerlessness.⁵³ I find this prescription to be an especially innovative operationalization of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, though it may be a long time before courts incorporate this radical idea into jurisprudence.

The gradual incorporation of a theory of intersectionality into Title VII employment discrimination cases and Scales-Trent's well-supported argument for re-interpreting black women's experiences of discrimination under Equal Protection law stand as formidable challenges to Okin's treatment of race as "significant" but not primary in women's oppression. Crenshaw and Scales-Trent demonstrate that courts have, to the benefit of black women, not taken as an observable "fact" that gender alone constitutes the primary source of oppression for black women. By placing black women's experiences of discrimination at the center of their theorizing, both Crenshaw and Scales-Trent refuse to disembodied and dehistoricize black femaleness. Their historicized depictions of black women's legal experiences expose the superficiality of the kind of difference lists referred to by Okin in her critique of difference feminism.⁵⁴

While critical race theorists' commitment to "multiple consciousness" aims to combat oppression hierarchies, they clearly imply that racism, structurally understood, functions as an especially powerful and historically embedded force in American law and society. But unlike Okin's "pure" feminism, the critical race theorists do not imagine racism as a "pure" paradigm; racism is central but constantly intersected by other "culturally salient" differences like gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Hence, for the critical race theorists anti-racist politics cannot be reduced to a "pure" picture of how racism impacts individual lives. "Pictures" of racism must be historicized, which means that other oppressive forces, like sexism, inevitably enter.

My discussion of black women's legal experiences may invite criticism that I have overlooked the very real oppressions in the lives of non-black women. To take the most obvious example, how would a historicized account of racism address white women's experiences of sexism? My answer is that both black women and white women can benefit from Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. As Crenshaw points out in her analysis of representational tropes used by feminists and civil rights activists to describe Anita Hill, black women are not the only losers in

⁴⁹ Scales-Trent, *supra* note 13, at 16-17.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 17.

⁵¹ Scales-Trent, *supra* note 13, at 21.

⁵² *Id.* at 34-35.

⁵³ *Id.* at 25.

⁵⁴ Okin, *supra* note 2, at 325.

the nominal separation between race and sex.⁵⁵ White women's interest in dismantling sexism and black men's interest in curbing the effects of racism are hindered, too. Crenshaw concludes: "When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when antiracism does not incorporate opposition to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose."⁵⁶ White feminists who tried to place Anita Hill within a narrative of sexism found themselves in direct competition with anti-racists who wanted to locate Anita Hill within a narrative of racism. The result, as Crenshaw observes, was that Hill's experiences as a black woman were erased and neither the "pure" feminists nor the "pure" anti-racists could articulate a coherent account of that national disaster.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

What the critical race theorists have given us so far is a new lens through which to examine sexism. This has import for feminist political theories like Susan Okin's, which adopt ahistorical "pictures" of oppression. Remembering racism as an especially salient oppressing force in American law and society does not issue in the fragmentary demise of feminism. Instead, by removing race from carelessly comprised difference lists and reinstating its historical meaning, we catch glimmers of an emancipatory politics that situates gender oppression within its defining paradigm in the United States: race.

Nonetheless, while I agree with the critical race theorists that racism, structurally understood, is a logical starting point for a wide-ranging emancipatory politics, I am left with one worry: Will this movement follow through on its stated commitment to multiple consciousness and achieve a politics that goes beyond intersectionality and achieves interdependence? So far no critical race scholar has produced a critique that incorporates more than one intersecting oppression into its race-centered enterprise. More complex accounts of multidimensionality stand as the movement's most pressing challenge. Audre Lorde imagined, as perhaps only a poet can, that a true commitment to interdependence would transport us into "the chaos of knowledge," from which we would "return with true visions of our future along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being."⁵⁸ Critical race theory exhibits great potential for moving in this direction. Time will tell how far it gets.

⁵⁵ Kimberle Crenshaw, *Whose Story is it Anyway?: Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill*, in *RACE-ING JUSTICE, EN-GENDERING POWER: ESSAYS ON ANITA HILL, CLARENCE THOMAS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY* 402, 405 (Toni Morrison ed., 1992).

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 406.

⁵⁸ AUDRE LORDE, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, in *SISTER OUTSIDER: ESSAYS AND SPEECHES* 110, 111-12 (1984).